

led the Senate's efforts through the U.S./Russian Agreement on Highly Enriched Uranium to secure 500 tons of this material from Russia, enough for perhaps 20,000 bombs.

More recently, Senator DOMENICI has focused his attention on 50 tons of weapons-grade plutonium that Russia has declared to be surplus; that's enough material for almost 10,000 nuclear weapons. He has led efforts to ensure that this surplus plutonium won't present us with a future threat.

His trips to Russia, first last July with Senator THOMPSON and Senator GRAMS, and then more recently to the Moscow Summit, focus on this issue. Through those trips, Senator DOMENICI is well known to the leadership of the Russian weapon programs. His proposals for rapid progress on this surplus plutonium have been thoroughly studied throughout the world, from Japan to France.

Senator DOMENICI discussed his proposals with President Clinton in late July and encouraged that plutonium disposition be a focus of this past Summit. The protocol on plutonium disposition at the Moscow Summit is an important first step, but it is only the first step.

We have to go far beyond just signing the protocol to secure the benefits that it can provide—to ensure that the material is never rebuilt into weapons or found in the hands of terrorists or rogue states. Furthermore, the Senate needs to advise the Administration on the detailed agreements that will enable real progress.

Today, I'm appointing a Senate Task Force on Plutonium Disposition to provide this input from the Senate to the Administration. I'm pleased that Senator DOMENICI has agreed to chair this task force, to continue his leadership on this vital topic.

Also serving on the task force will be Senator RICHARD LUGAR of Indiana, Senator FRANK MURKOWSKI of Alaska, Senator JON KYL of Arizona, Senator CARL LEVIN of Michigan, Senator JEFF BINGAMAN of New Mexico and Senator PATTY MURRAY of Washington. Each of these Members brings knowledge and concern that will be valuable in guiding the Senate on this issue.

As agreements are finalized, the Senate may be called upon to approve programs or provide resources; we will depend on this task force to provide information for informed debates on these subjects.

Disposition of the current 50 tons of Russian excess weapons-grade plutonium is an important national goal. We have a golden window of opportunity to rid the world of materials for thousands of nuclear weapons. We must seize this moment.

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Monday, September 28, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,525,125,982,443.88 (Five tril-

lion, five hundred twenty-five billion, one hundred twenty-five million, nine hundred eighty-two thousand, four hundred forty-three dollars and eighty-eight cents).

Five years ago, September 28, 1993, the federal debt stood at \$4,386,349,000,000 (Four trillion, three hundred eighty-six billion, three hundred forty-nine million).

Ten years ago, September 28, 1988, the federal debt stood at \$2,587,978,000,000 (Two trillion, five hundred eighty-seven billion, nine hundred seventy-eight million).

Fifteen years ago, September 28, 1983, the federal debt stood at \$1,354,464,000,000 (One trillion, three hundred fifty-four billion, four hundred sixty-four million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,170,661,982,443.88 (Four trillion, one hundred seventy billion, six hundred sixty-one million, nine hundred eighty-two thousand, four hundred forty-three dollars and eighty-eight cents) during the past 15 years.

#### WELLSTONE AMENDMENT TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I supported Senator WELLSTONE's amendment to the Higher Education Act and I regret that it was not included in the conference report. The amendment would have increased educational opportunities for people on welfare. It passed the Senate with a bipartisan majority, but was rejected by House Republicans, even though it was also supported by the White House, and by more than 150 social welfare groups.

The goal of this amendment is to correct a serious deficiency in the harsh welfare reform law enacted two years ago. Too often, welfare reform around the country has focused on immediate work experience as a means to achieve financial independence, but the focus is excessive, because it reduced options for welfare recipients who wish to complete to two- or four-year college degrees.

Welfare reform around the country has tended to focus on immediate work experience as a means to achieve financial independence. The new direction of welfare reform at both state and federal levels has generally reduced the options available for welfare recipients who wish to complete a two- or four-year college degree. It is extremely difficult for single parents to be full-time students and work part-time and still give adequate time to their families.

The welfare reform program called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, is based on the idea that work is the best way to achieve independence, especially if the work comes with job security and fair wages. For many people, education is the best road to jobs that achieve these goals. Higher education is often the best way to earn higher wages, achieve independence from welfare, and provide protection from future poverty and unemployment.

Recent studies have found that the average wage for a person who was previously on welfare and then earned a degree is \$11.00 an hour, and that each year of education completed by welfare recipients increases wages by as much as \$1.14 per hour. A study of 4,500 working mothers in the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation found that a college degree is worth an additional \$2.58 per hour for working mothers, compared to the wages of high school graduates. The special importance of higher education for women is emphasized by other data showing that women need a college degree to make the same amount of money that men earn with only a high school education.

The results of these studies are hardly surprising. We know the importance of higher education and the advantages it opens up. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in March 1995 that adult workers with less than a high school diploma earned an annual average of only \$13,697. Adult workers with a high school degree earned \$20,248. With an associates degree, they earned \$26,363, and with a bachelor's degree they earned \$37,224.

The job and career benefits of higher education are also demonstrated by the poverty statistics of the Department of Labor. In 1995 only 1.5 percent of those with a four-year college degree were living in poverty compared to 3.3 percent of those with an associates degree, 6.1 percent of those with a high school diploma, and 17.2 percent of those without a high school diploma.

The evidence for the Wellstone amendment is overwhelming, and a bipartisan majority of the Senate was right to pass it. Under its provisions, 24 months of post-secondary education or vocational educational training would be permissible work activities under welfare reform.

I commend Senator WELLSTONE's leadership on this important issue. States should have the flexibility to create responsible ways to move people from welfare to work, by allowing welfare recipients to include higher education as a part of their effort to achieve financial independence and provide effectively for their families. The House conferees were wrong to reject this positive reform, and we should do all we can to enact it as soon as possible.

#### CONGRESS NEEDS TO ACT ON HEALTH INSURANCE FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, this weekend, the New York Times reported on the latest data on Americans without health insurance. According to the Census Bureau, the number of uninsured has now reached 43.4 million of our fellow citizens—an increase of 1.7 million since last year. This increase is on top of the growth in the uninsured of one million last year. The proportion of Americans without health insurance is now higher than it has been